Phoenix Historical Society
Organized in 1998; Opened in 1999

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The Gasburg Gazette

Volume 21, Issue 3

Summer 2025

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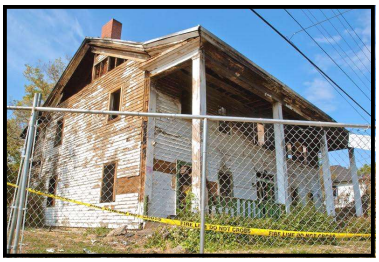
Colver House Before the Fire



Colver House After the Fire

Remembering the Loss of the Colver House

Flames in the Heart of Phoenix--The Colver House Gone

Telephones began to ring around midnight as word spread throughout town early Monday (September 15, 2008)) that the Colver House was being swallowed up in flame.

"It's so very sad," said a neighbor who, with her husband , owns property adjoining the house. "One of our tenants called and said do you realize that it's on fire?"

They got dressed and drove downtown.

"It looked like the roof was pretty much caved in," she said, "and through the windows you could see the floors falling down. They were dumping a lot of water on it. They had so many fire trucks dumping water and of course the logs were 14 inches wide. . Maybe it was enough. I don't know."

She was surprised that most of the people watching the fire didn't realize the significance of the long-time landmark.

Another neighbor, a few blocks away, said she was "getting the soundest sleep I'd had for a long time, when the telephone rang just after midnight.

"One of my renters who works with the fire department called and said, "I just wanted you to know that the Colver House is in flames."

She grabbed her camera and headed out.

"That house means everything to this town," she said. "It's so much a part of our history and of the Valley's history."

Historic Preservationist, George Kramer, hadn't heard of the fire until he was asked for comment Monday morning.

"You're kidding!" he said. "Oh my gosh. What a loss. What a shame."

Calling the building a "wonderful thing," Kramer said because of its location along a main road in the center of an incorporated city, the house was the "most visible of the very few buildings that were built in the 1850s and still survived.

"The miracle was that it was still there. That it survived all these years. It was the heart of Phoenix.

"Whenever you lose a historic building," Kramer said, "you lose all options for its future and it's just a shame. It shows you how fragile our history is."

A few months before fire destroyed the Colver House a potential buyer had asked the Phoenix Planning Commission for permission to demolish the structure. The community exploded in anger and--until the fire--they had managed to save Sam's log home.

Taken from *History Snoopin' True Tales of Oregon and Northern California* by William M. Miller

The Sometimes Eccentric Life of Samuel Colver by Bill Miller

Sam Colver would have loved the controversy. In fact, he probably would have led the frantic charge. You see, Sam was an educated man who marched to the proverbial different drum, and expected others to follow him. Some said he was eccentric, others thought he was just plain crazy, but most people just didn't understand this restless adventurer.

He traced his family back to the Massachusetts Bay Puritans of 1635, where his great-great-grandfather, Edward, served in the Colonial wars. Although family records say Edward grew "increasingly cantankerous and senile in his old age while serving beer on the streets,' there is nothing else to suggest anything close to eccentricities.

The rest of the family seems quite normal; at least, no strange family stories have survived.

Born in Spencertown, New York in 1815, Sam's father, Samuel Sr., was apparently a surveyor. Family history says that he was the "first to take a survey chain into Ohio."

Becoming one of the wealthiest farmers in the middle of the Buckeye State, Samuel Sr. married a local girl, Rachel Curry, in 1806. They raised five children, the two youngest and only boys being, Sam Jr., born in 1815 and Hiram, four years later.

Rachel wrote poetry and it was Sam who seems to have followed her example. Though apparently none of his poems survive, those who have read them agree that they were "horrible." But, Sam didn't care what others thought, he spent the rest of his life singing and writing poems, and early on, it got him into trouble.

When he was 20 and studying law in Indiana, Sam wrote a particularly obnoxious poem about one of his professors. He got a reprimand and told either to apologize or leave the school.

He left, headed for Texas, and became a Texas Ranger with Sam Houston, both fighting for the territory's independence from Mexico. With victory and the Texas Republic established in 1836, Sam became an Indian scout and fur trader on the frontier.

He eventually returned to Ohio where he quickly found another diversion. While traveling with a hypnotist, he began to learn the trade of mesmerism, mind reading, and showmanship. That's when he discovered that he liked to give lectures. Relatives said after that he would give a blistering speech at the drop of a hat.

In 1845, Sam married what many believed was the only woman who could stand up to him, Huldah Callander. Orphaned when just a toddler, Huldah was tenacious and self-sufficient. Her stepmother said it best. "If there's an easy or a hard way of doing anything, Huldah will always choose the hard way."

In 1847, their son Louis was born, followed by daughter Isabel In 1850. Isabel was born in a covered wagon, but not while traveling the Oregon Trail. Sam had moved the family to St. Joseph, Missouri and they were living in a wagon until they could leave for Oregon.

Safely arriving in Oregon Country in the fall of 1850, Sam and brother Hiram left their families in the Willamette Valley, while they searched for a better place to live and maybe did a little bit of prospecting for gold. It wouldn't be the last time Sam would leave the family behind.

By the end of 1851, he was building a log cabin along Bear Creek, across from where his house stood until the 2008 fire.

The family reunited only briefly. Appointed Indian Agent, Sam left for his headquarters in Port Orford, on the Oregon Coast. A hired hand would care for the family.

It was nearly a year before he returned to the Rogue Valley and became Indian Agent for the local tribes. Some rumors said that Sam was abusing his position by taking reservation wheat and other supplies, but the Army commander at Fort Lane insisted it wasn't so and tried to save Sam's job.

Even after serving as interpreter for two Indians accused of murder, and also helping to negotiate and even signing the Table Rock Treaty of 1853 with the local tribes, Sam was dismissed. In 1869, he tried to put a fence around the site where the treaty had been signed, hoping to commemorate its importance, but he got no support from the community.

Sam reunited with his parents who had "sailed around the Horn" and come to live with him just before he began building his big block house.

Construction began in the summer of 1855, just as the last battles between Rogue Valley settlers and Native Americans were about to begin. Completed a year later, it was built of hand-hewn logs, 14 inches square, planed

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Phoenix Historical Society Board Members

Dick Croly: President

Ken Kantor: Vice President

Dorothy Cotton: Secretary

Dorothy Cotton: Treasurer

Lorraine Sexton

Margaret Croly

First Spring Fling Potluck

June 10th ushered in our well attended first Spring Fling Potluck. The Phoenix Museum was filled with hearty eaters along with the good variety of food presented. Think it may become an annual event!

Rehashing the evening's event

Samuel Colver, continued from Page 2

smooth on the outside, secured with wooden pegs, and dovetailing at the corners. The four distinctive columns at the front, originally supported a second floor veranda.

Persistent stories say there were portholes in the second-story walls, which were used by the settlers to fire rifles at attacking Indians, although, people who have seen the inside of the house, say they never could find any sign of the holes.

The house was the center of community activity. Upstairs in the large hall, weddings, dances , religious services, and all kinds of meetings were held. In the fall of 1857, a nasty debate pitted slavery and anti-slavery citizens against each other. The Colvers had become members of a brand new political party, the Republicans, and they were opposed to this "peculiar institution."

When the South shelled Fort Sumter and the Civil War began; Sam and his Republican friends set up a 100-foot flagpole near the house and cheered as Samuel Sr. hoisted the Stars and Stripes.

The years ahead would bring many trials for Sam. His parents died within a month of each other. His son was accidentally shot and killed, while helping a neighbor catch a prowler. A year later, Sam's daughter died of diphtheria. In his grief, he had a mental breakdown and spent a few months in the asylum at Salem.

The strangest part of the story is how it all ended.

In 1891, a stubborn 75-year-old Sam left Klamath Falls for home in the middle of winter. He fell from his horse right into Klamath Lake and drowned. Because of the snow, his body wasn't recovered until late spring.

That was Sam. Right to the very end, living life on his own terms.

From the book *History Snoopin' True Tales of Oregon and Northern California* by William M. Miller

Phoenix Historical Society & Museum
607 N. Church Street
P. O. Box 1466
Phoenix, Oregon 97535

Telephone (541) 512-0614

Open Thursday thru Saturday
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Any historical information regarding Phoenix would be much appreciated by anyone receiving this newsletter. Please send to above address or editor.

Become a member of Phoenix Historical Society for just $10.00 a year per person. Join now and help preserve the history of Phoenix and the surrounding area.
Regular PHS meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at **7:00 p.m. at the Phoenix Museum.**

This 'n That

Reminder of why Phoenix Historical Society/Museum is here in Phoenix, Oregon:

Key purposes of a historical society:

Preservation:
They safeguard historical materials such as documents, photographs, artifacts, and buildings to ensure they survive for future generation
Collection & Archiving:
Historical societies maintain collections and archives, including libraries, providing resources for researchers and anyone interested in the past.
Research & Interpretation:
They conduct research to understand and interpret the past, often focusing on local, ethnic, or family histories.
Education & Public Engagement:
Societies educate the public through various means, including exhibits, workshops, lectures, tours, and educational publications.
Community Building:
By bringing people together to explore and celebrate a shared heritage, they foster a strong sense of community identity and pride.
Cultural Tourism:
They promote tourism by highlighting historical sites and events, which can also help local economies.
Architectural & Historic Preservation:
Many societies are involved in the stewardship and preservation of historic buildings, landmarks, and architectural sites.

Please join us for our Annual
Potluck & Membership Drive
September 9, 2025
6:00 pm at the Phoenix Museum
Bring a dish to share
And your own table service
Drinks Provided